

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 457 206

TM 033 304

AUTHOR Mishler, Elliot G.; Steinitz, Vicky
TITLE Solidarity Work: Researchers in the Struggle for Social Justice.
PUB DATE 2001-01-00
NOTE 20p.; Paper presented at the Annual Qualitative Interest Group Conference on Interdisciplinary Qualitative Studies (14th, Athens, GA, January 12-14, 2001).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Advocacy; *Educational Research; Ideology; *Politics; *Research Utilization; *Researchers; Social Influences; Social Problems
IDENTIFIERS *Social Justice; *Solidarity

ABSTRACT

The role of researchers in the struggle for social justice was explored, focusing on some of the dilemmas faced by researchers doing solidarity work. Solidarity work is negotiating ways to combine different interests to make research findings useful and relevant to political aims. People doing solidarity work describe themselves as activity scholars or researchers, and advocacy is the most common form of solidarity work. Two examples of solidarity work in the context of welfare reform are described in which the aim was to undermine stereotypes of poor women on welfare and to document false and misleading claims in government and media reports about the positive effects of proposed welfare laws and regulations. Another example was a human rights welfare monitoring project to evaluate the effects of the new welfare policies passed in Massachusetts. This project illustrated the difficulties in empowering welfare recipients and in mobilizing low-income people. Another example is an international study of the effects on women of war-related violence that shows the possibilities of combining forms of partnership with advocacy. The work of the Fourth World Movement was not conceived of primarily as research and was not carried out by academic researchers, but the Movement provides an example for the academic world of the use of documentation and best practices case studies. A study of the conceptualization of AIDS in Haiti and the United States shows how research that fuses advocacy and partnership can change social attitudes. By reviewing a variety of approaches to solidarity work, this paper encourages researchers to look for opportunities that fit their academic interests and skills and their political perspectives. (Contains 15 references.) (SLD)

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND
DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS
BEEN GRANTED BY

E. Mishler

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

✓ This document has been reproduced as
received from the person or organization
originating it.

□ Minor changes have been made to
improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this
document do not necessarily represent
official OERI position or policy.

Solidarity Work: Researchers in the Struggle for Social Justice*

Elliot G. Mishler & Vicky Steinitz

Harvard Medical School and University of Massachusetts-Boston

* Presented at the 14th Annual QUIG Conference on Interdisciplinary Qualitative Studies, Georgia Center for Continuing Education, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia, January 12-14, 2001: Social and Economic Justice: Deconstructing Myths and Masks Through Qualitative Research.

Prepublication draft: Please do not cite or quote without authors' permission.
<http://www.coe.uga.edu/quig/>

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Introduction

E: Vicky and I are very pleased to be here. We would like to thank Kathleen deMarrais, David Kurtz, and the Qualitative Inquiry Group at the University of Georgia for inviting us to join you in discussing how we can make the work we do - as teachers, scholars, clinicians, and researchers - relevant to and informed by the collective struggle for social justice and a more humane society.

We wish to dedicate our presentation to the memory of Ignacio Martin-Baro, the Salvadoran Jesuit priest and social psychologist who was assassinated by a death squad in November 1989, with five of his Jesuit brothers, their housekeeper and her daughter. He was an inspirational figure for all of us who met and learned from him about the destructive psychological and social impact of state-sponsored war and violence on children, their families, and communities. In his posthumously published volume of papers, "Writings for a Liberation Psychology" (Martin-Baro, 1994), he asks what psychology might look like if we based our work on the "preferential option for the poor" advocated in the liberation theology movement. In contrast to a reactionary psychology "whose application lends support to an unjust social order," he argues that if our aim is to serve the "liberation needs of people," we need to ally ourselves with poor and oppressed groups in their struggles for justice and dignity and develop a progressive psychology that helps people "find the road to their personal and collective historical fulfillment." (p. 24)

V: We decided to do this presentation together in a rash moment. Elliot and I share political commitments but our identities as researchers differ considerably. At best, I am an ambivalent researcher, always wondering whether a project is worth doing and what kinds of payoffs it will have in advancing the educational and political ends which are my primary interest. Elliot's primary professional identity is as a researcher, and particularly a methodologist. He is fascinated by a wide range of inquiry issues, theoretical arguments, and methodological questions. As long as someone is passionate about a research problem, he will take the work seriously. I dismiss much research out of hand as unnecessary and of limited value. So, we thought it would be fun and challenging to see if we could find a way to dialogue about the role of researchers in the struggle for social justice.

One thing we did agree on from the outset was that we were uncomfortable with the typical, formal keynote address with us as the "come-from-aways," the invited speakers peddling a set of truths, and you as the audience sopping up or privately scoffing at our offerings. As a first step toward opening a broader dialogues, we would like you to take two or three minutes to share with a person sitting next to you your reasons for coming to the conference and a question or dilemma you face in your research which you hope will be addressed.

Sharing Time ...

E: Despite the reservations Vicky expressed for both of us about our role as designated speakers, she and I will be passing the baton back and forth for awhile before we open our dialogue to our collective discussion. But we hope that having voiced your questions and concerns at this early point, you will be especially attentive to whether or not, and how, we address them so that the discussion will be anchored by your interests. Since, as she observed, we have no truths to peddle, we will focus on some dilemmas faced by researchers doing solidarity work for which we have no resolutions, but which we may all gain a deeper understanding of by learning from each others' experiences.

When I first began thinking of what I might have to say about the the relation of qualitative research to issues of social and economic justice, a memory surfaced of spirited discussions with friends when we were finishing our undergraduate studies and heading off to graduate training in psychology and the social sciences. As political activists, we had visions of how we would use our soon-to-be-gained skills as scientific researchers to help change the world. At the center of our debates and arguments with each other was the question of whether there were ways of doing research so that the findings could only be used by the good guys for good purposes. Briefly, and to our disappointment, our answer was "No." This was not because we believed that scientific research is objective, neutral, and independent of political positions and social forces, but because it was evident that the same findings could and were used for different and often opposed political ends.

In retrospect, I think my friends and I as neophyte social scientists framed the question incorrectly. The basic issue in regard to whether or not our studies can be useful in the struggle for social justice does not have to do with the reliability or validity of our methods - nor, to bring the point home to our conference theme - with whether we do qualitative or quantitative research. Rather, it has to do with the form of relationship we establish with the groups and movements with whom we ally ourselves, the nature of our collaboration with them in carrying out our studies, and how we negotiate ways to combine our different interests to make our findings useful and relevant to our shared political aims. This is what we mean by solidarity work. We will present examples of different types of solidarity work, beginning with our own experiences and then reporting work by others, focusing particularly on recurrent problems and dilemmas in such projects. Our basic question is: How can we learn to be of use in the struggle for social justice?

Welfare Waiver Open Letter and Affidavit

E: People doing solidarity work use various labels to describe their roles: e.g., activist scholars or researchers, academic allies, emissaries, advocates; and such terms as "pragmatic solidarity" or "partnership" to refer to the type and level of collaboration they enter into with others. These are fuzzy and overlapping categories, but they point to the boundaries between researcher and activist roles, and to the different aims and intended audiences of our studies. Advocacy, which we might gloss as acting *for* others on behalf of their interests, is the most common form of solidarity work for academic scholars and researchers, sometimes mixed with some degree of partnership, that is, working *with* others. I want to begin with brief reports of two examples of work Vicky and I

were involved in where advocacy was the dominant mode. The primary aim of these efforts, as in much of the research undertaken as part of solidarity work that we will review, was to counter the "official story." In these examples, as in Vicky's work that she will discuss, that focus on the impact of the new welfare reform laws, the aim was to undermine the stereotypes of poor women on welfare and to document the false and misleading claims in both government and media reports about the positive effects of welfare laws and regulations.

In the Spring of 1995, the assault on the existing U.S. welfare system by the conservative Republican-controlled congress was well underway. In Massachusetts, the governor and legislature were eager to be in the forefront of the stampede by politicians in other states to demonstrate how harsh and punitive they could be towards poor women and their families. A new state law reduced benefits to welfare recipients, imposed work requirements, and set more stringent requirements for eligibility.

These changes violated federal guidelines about what states could and could not do with regard to benefits and eligibility. But Federal legislation also allowed waivers to these guidelines for small-scale demonstration projects. The guidelines for such waivers mandated careful assessment of both positive and negative effects through pilot or experimental projects before changes were applied to the whole population of welfare recipients. The state submitted a waiver request that did not meet these mandated requirements. We joined other members of an inter-university Academic Working Group on Poverty in the task of developing critiques of the waiver request. As one part of this collective effort, Vicky and I drafted an open letter to the U.S. Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services - which we also circulated to various political leaders and the media - detailing how it failed to conform to ethical and scientific standards for "experiments." In one week we collected signatures in support of this statement from more than 260 academics in Massachusetts.

At the same time, the Massachusetts Law Reform Institute, an advocacy group of lawyers, was preparing to file a brief in the courts for an injunction against implementation of the state law. They asked me for a supporting affidavit that would document how the law failed to meet ethical and scientific standards for research. In preparing that statement, I relied considerably on what sociolinguists would call the rhetoric of authority. I highlighted my academic credentials, my long experience of doing research, my years as Chair of my department's human subjects review committee. I traced the history of current regulations for the protection of human subjects in research from the Nuremberg Code through pivotal studies that led to these regulations, which showed how members of vulnerable and powerless populations had been exploited and put at risk without their consent. I referred to the concept of a risk-benefit ratio as the criterion for evaluating whether or not a study met agreed-upon ethical standards. And I specified how the state's proposal for an evaluation study, which was part of its waiver request, failed to meet scientific and ethical standards and would not provide information that would allow assessment and comparison of the benefits and harmful effects of their "welfare reform demonstration."

Approval of the waiver request was delayed for a period of time and we would like to

think our efforts, along with those of many others, had some effect on the approval process. But the whole issue became moot when the so-called welfare reform law was signed by President Clinton in August 1996, which pretty much allowed states to do what they wanted with their block grant of federal funds.

What lessons might be learned from this example? Both the open letter and affidavit were similar in their arguments about the violation of ethical and scientific standards in the Massachusetts law. They were also fairly pure examples of advocacy - of acting *for* but not *with* welfare recipients. The intent of the letter was to mobilize the academic community in the struggle against unjust and punitive welfare legislation. And in preparing the affidavit, I drew upon an academic discourse about research. Although both the Academic Working Group on Poverty and the Mass Law Reform Institute were engaged in other forms of alliance with welfare recipients and activists, the letter and affidavit were isolated from this larger context. We did not ask welfare recipients or activists to participate in their preparation or dissemination. Their voices were not included and, looking back on this episode, their voices appear to have been explicitly excluded by our implicit assumption that they would have nothing to contribute to a technical argument about scientific ethics and research methods. It is no wonder - though we were naive enough at the time not to expect it - that when we asked an activist group of welfare recipients for help in getting names of academics who might sign our letter, our request received an angry reply. They had not heard of what we were doing, had not been asked to join in preparing the letter, viewed us as arrogant in speaking for them.

I believe advocacy has an important place in the range of ways to do solidarity work, but this was an instructive experience. Opportunities for academics to engage in some type of advocacy are, in a sense, always there to be taken up, e.g., directing our studies and our courses to issues of inequity and injustice, offering our expertise to activist organizations and civil rights lawyers, publicizing our views and research findings in local newspapers through Op-Ed pieces, and in many other ways. But in doing such work, we need to be aware of the dilemma I have been pointing to - that those we claim to be speaking *for* may feel they have been again excluded from a process that affects them directly and denied their right to speak and act as agents for their own interests.

We have no easy one-shoe-fits-all resolution to this problem - different situations require different context-relevant strategies. Nonetheless, it seems to us that a necessary though not sufficient condition for minimizing such conflicts is to have established connections with the people for whom we are advocating that provides a basis for trust, and for dialogue and negotiation about what we and they are doing. This could take many forms, e.g., joining them in political acts of protest they organize, from demonstrations to civil disobedience; offering professional services, resources, or expertise that may be useful either to their organizing activities or to their efforts to deal with the official system of regulations and services. All of these show concretely that we are standing *with* them and not just speaking *for* them.

Human Rights Welfare Monitoring Project

V: ... We undertook the advocacy efforts Elliot described at a moment of defeat and outrage for the welfare rights movement. After many years of struggle by a broad based coalition for authentic welfare reform, the Massachusetts legislature had just passed repressive welfare legislation, far harsher than anything we had imagined. Unable to stop implementation of these new regulations, we turned to the question of how to document their impacts. I decided to use the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a framework for evaluating the effects of the new policies and to model my work on the methods of international human rights monitors.

Before I describe the Welfare and Human Rights Monitoring Project in some detail, I want to talk briefly about an earlier aborted interview study of welfare recipients. I became an academic ally of the welfare rights movement as the War on the Poor intensified in the 90's and more and more of my students on welfare were finding it harder and harder to stay in college. From its earliest days, my college, the College of Public and Community Service (CPCS), an alternative, competency based college for non-traditional, urban adult students, has been active in the welfare rights struggle. Prior to the new laws, we had always had a sizable group of students on welfare and a curriculum aimed at fostering political activism. And the students were active on their own behalf. For example, a group of welfare student moms formed an activist organization that fought successfully to have the college accepted as a site where students receiving public assistance could fulfil their educational and training requirements.

With the relentless scapegoating of welfare moms taking its toll, I was searching for a way to become more active in the struggle. As a social psychologist with a longstanding interest in attitude change and ideological development, it was obvious to me that the other side was winning the propaganda war. I began conversations with leaders at the Coalition for Basic Human Needs (CBHN), the major recipient-led state-wide organization, about ways to counter the negative media images. They asked me to do a series of in-depth interviews with recipient activists which could convey the complex realities of their lives, the difficulties faced by women on welfare and their heroic efforts to make a better life for themselves and their children. My task was to generate positive portraits for media dissemination and I accepted it with alacrity, believing I had found a way to be of use.

It wasn't long before I had to confront Elliot's conundrum. It just isn't possible to do research that can only be used by the good guys and gals for good purposes! My interviewees were resourceful women who had faced devastating difficulties but developed strategies for making their way. They knew that without a college degree they were consigned to low wage, unstable jobs and so some had chosen to stay on welfare in order to complete their schooling. They knew that without a strong recipient-led movement, they would be at the mercy of liberal do-gooders and so they had become outspoken activists. While to me their stories were hero stories, I knew they would not be read as such by the vast majority of American readers who are moved by accounts of the 100 Neediest Cases but made uncomfortable by tales of "uppity" poor women who think they have a right to define the terms of their lives. After a series of difficult meetings with CBHN leaders in which I tried to explain why I didn't think it was possible to frame their stories in ways which would be viewed sympathetically by a mainstream audience, we

agreed to terminate the project.

This experience crystallized for me the dilemmas involved in characterizing what counts as a positive or negative finding in the world of solidarity research. Of course, I favor exploration of strengths and coping strategies and deplore studies based on deficit models which only serve to re-victimize their respondents. Yet, I also know, as Gordon Allport pointed out long ago in The Nature of Prejudice, that scapegoaters are remarkably deft at turning anything positive into a negative. Thus, it is virtually impossible to craft a positive account which can't be misinterpreted, willfully or otherwise.

The "transforming positive into negative" dilemma surfaces over and over again in our efforts to figure out what kinds of data will have the impact we desire on public and official opinion. A recent example is the controversy over Kathryn Edin and Laura Lein's study of how welfare recipients manage to survive, given the woefully inadequate benefits they receive, reported in Making Ends Meet (Edin & Lein, 1997). While many have hailed this research as the first in-depth account of the economic coping strategies of welfare moms, others, myself included, believe that it provides ammunition to the enemy. Detailing how women cobble together enough money to keep going thru a combination of support from fathers and other family members, under the table jobs, and prostitution can be read as a tale of resourceful determination in the face of adversity but it can also be read as a tale of welfare fraud, particularly by those who refuse to acknowledge that it is impossible to survive on a welfare check.

Flash forward to 1995 and the immediate aftermath of the harsh new Massachusetts' legislation. It was hard for me to believe that the majority of the state's population really understood what the new policies would mean. Perhaps, it was still possible to mobilize the decent majority to rise up and demand these punitive laws be rescinded. What kind of approach might arouse an audience, currently unengaged but potentially sympathetic? My own experience in the Latin America solidarity movement had introduced me to the power of testimony, both as a means of documenting the atrocities of illegitimate governmental policies and of re-empowering the victims of those atrocities. I knew about the work of international human rights monitors and was intrigued by the possibility of attempting to frame the new welfare policies as violations of universal human rights. Perhaps, the claim that Massachusetts' laws violated international human rights principles might be startling enough to attract attention. I had a sabbatical coming up and decided to spend the year seeing if I could figure out a way to implement a state-wide welfare and human rights monitoring project.

I chose to view the new regulations through the lens of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the original statement of moral principles adopted by the United Nations in 1948. At the outset, I expected to be recording economic human rights abuses, violations of Article 25 of the Universal Declaration – the right to an adequate standard of living. The second and less well known part of Art. 25 also seemed particularly relevant "Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection." With benefits forty percent below the poverty level pre-welfare

reform,, recipients were already having serious troubles. Add time limits without any emergency assistance provisions, a family cap denying benefits to children born while on welfare and restrictions on teen parents' access to assistance and it's difficult not to see the legislation as a direct assault on the economic rights of poor women and children.

I soon realized that the new regulations also severely compromised recipients' civil and political rights. This was not new but an intensification of a long-standing situation where the due process and privacy rights of recipients have been routinely violated. The threat of sanctions for not identifying fathers, for children's school absences and for not having children inoculated – these new requirements flew in the face of the non-discrimination, equal treatment, privacy and protection from assaults on ones reputation and dignity Articles of the Declaration. Work requirements can be viewed as indentured servitude, violating the right to freely chosen work..

I wrote A Call for Human Rights Monitors based on the contradictions between the UDHR articles and specific features of the legislation, and began a series of meetings with members of the welfare rights network. There was general enthusiasm for the idea although I was warned that advocates and activists were so besieged I would have to do most of the legwork myself. We agreed that the monitoring project would have dual aims: first, to gather documentation which would fuel and mobilize opposition to the new laws; and, second to serve as an organizing and educational tool for recipients. We discussed the dangers of "documenting atrocity stories" and the need to insure that the project data were not used, as so often happens, to dehumanize and re-victimize oppressed people.

The Welfare and Human Rights Monitoring Project was planned and carried out in partnership with a number of advocacy and activist groups. Early on, the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee, an advocacy organization with a legislative agenda and a long history of international human rights work, agreed to sponsor and house the project. With the help of a Coalition for Basic Human Needs staff member, I contacted a wide range of key players in recipient rights groups, legal services and community organizations, and human service, education and health advocacy groups across the state.. Recipients were encouraged to write up their own reports of human rights violations and a hot line was set up at the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee to receive reports.

The actual process of collecting human rights violation reports was slow and labor intensive. While stories abounded – at every meeting, people told horror stories -- actually getting people to write up and submit violation reports turned out to be much more difficult than I had anticipated. I found myself driving across the state, sitting in offices where, inbetween emergency phone calls and other crises, I took down stories and filled out Human Rights Violation report forms.

The first project report (Steinitz, 1996) documented five major areas where abuse was rampant:

- 1) Unjust paternity identification sanctions: 1800 women were sanctioned for failing to

provide information which, in many cases they either did not have or could not provide without placing themselves at risk.

2) Revictimization of victims of domestic violence: battered women are forced to expose intimate details of their lives and prove their vulnerabilities to gain exemption from paternal identification and work requirements, and time limits.. In Massachusetts, as of March 1999, only 49 domestic violence time limit waivers had been approved, this in a state where more than two-thirds of the case load have been victims of domestic violence. (UUSC, 2000)

3) Rigid imposition of teen parent regulations: in the first year, more than half the mothers under 18 were dropped from the roles for failing to meet arbitrary education and housing requirements which in many cases did not address their needs and often placed them in unresolvable double bind situations.

4) Denial of educational opportunities: work requirements forced many students to drop out of college. Others, denied permission to apply to college were directed to short-term training programs for low-paying jobs with no mobility prospects.

5) "Lawlessness" in the Department of Transitional Assistance office: Denial of benefits to recipients who in fact are legally entitled to them is endemic in the system. So is failure to inform them of rights to appeal rulings..

After the first year, the UUSC assumed major responsibility for the monitoring project, expanded it to three other states, and issued subsequent project reports directed to state and federal decision-makers that continue to tell chilling stories of the pain these laws inflict on poor families, and document how rules and regulations obstruct due process, impose unlawful sanctions, and invade the privacy and dignity of recipients. (UUSC, 2000)

The Welfare and Human Rights Monitoring Project was a roller coaster ride that greatly complicated my understanding of the complexities of doing solidarity research. I knew from the beginning that it would be difficult to sustain the recipient empowerment objective of the project.. I had visions of using human rights education as a way to help recipients move from passivity and hopelessness to action, for once women learned that they did not have to accept whatever decisions authorities made, that they could appeal and challenge, they were in a much better position to defend themselves. But this kind of education requires a sustained, long term commitment and much greater involvement with recipient-led groups than I had planned for. Nonetheless, the potential effectiveness of a human rights approach to mobilizing low-income people is confirmed by the inspired work of the Kensington Welfare Rights Union, a Philadelphia-based poor people's group. It gathered reports by criss-crossing the country in an Economic Human Rights Campaign bus, a tour that culminated in a march to the United Nations where caskets filled with HRV reports were presented to the Secretary General. If you're seeking new energy for the struggle, I recommend "Outriders," an engrossing video on the Kensington Welfare Rights Union. (Yates & Kinoy, 1998).

My efforts to get the media to pay attention to the results of the WHRMP confronted me with other dilemmas, some endemic to all qualitative research and others, particularly problematic when vulnerable people are involved.. Invariably, the first question asked by news

reporters would be: how many violations have you found? They were completely unmoved by my argument that a single human rights violation was unacceptable and looked at me with perplexity when I asked them how many violations would be enough for them to decide there was a problem. Individual reports were always treated as stories, in contrast with welfare department official surveys which were always treated as hard evidence. I never could figure out how to prove I had uncovered a statistically significant number of violations.

An additional problem was the media's insatiable demands for live bodies, actual recipients they could interview. While I handled the issue of confidentiality by only giving the names of the small minority of recipients who had indicated an interest in talking to the press, I could not protect them from being misrepresented. Further, the state Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) had a propensity for retaliating against "trouble-makers." I heard numerous accounts of harassment by workers and case closings coming in suspicious proximity to being publicly identified as a recipient activist. The official response to news stories was to demand names and details so they could investigate the accuracy of the HRV reports. In a few instances where the cases came from legal services and were a matter of public record, the DTA did acknowledge wrong-doing; they invariably blamed individual workers, never the policies or the systemic way in which they were implemented.

The issue of verification is a complex one. A major difference between the WHRMP and international monitoring efforts is in the stance toward verification. I took the position that reports from recipient rights groups should stand as presented without any independent determination as to their accuracy, a very different approach from international monitoring where independent verification of human rights abuses is required. Here is one of the places where my primary stance as a movement ally rather than an independent researcher was critical and where I had to face the contradictions between my documentation and empowerment aims.

A final dilemma I want to raise has to do with my commitment to documenting the plight of the "disappeared," those former recipients who have become invisible, and my difficulties in actually doing so. Official evaluations use decreases in the rolls and increases in employed as indicators of the success of welfare reform. They ignore what's actually happening in people's lives and make little to no effort to find non-respondents. The non-response rate is duly noted in small print and then ignored. I expected to gather HRV reports from some of these invisible women; in retrospect, I was naive. The paradox is that, almost by definition, these vulnerable women, on their own without any supports, were beyond the reach of the network of monitors. My reports came almost entirely from women who had found their way to service, advocacy or activist groups. Reaching those who have become invisible requires a deeper, more sustained commitment and approach, such as that of the Fourth World Movement, an international organization dedicated to eradicating extreme poverty and promoting human rights, whose work I will discuss later.

Participatory Action Research: Effects on Women of War-Related Violence

E: We're going to turn now to examples of alliances with communities of long-term, sustained

involvement and combine forms of partnership with advocacy.

In the 1960s and 1970s, activist scholars and researchers who aligned themselves with the civil rights and anti-Vietnam War movements, engaged in a broad critique of the dominant theoretical and research models in their disciplines. One popular slogan was that our task was to "give 'it' away," where the "it" referred to our special expertise. The aim, in a sense, was to make ourselves redundant by training oppressed groups to do their own studies, create their own service programs, build their own economic and political institutions.

From the present vantage point in time, it is obvious that this utopian program did not catch fire. Our disciplines were - and are - as resistant to radical, progressive change as the larger society. But one approach, participatory action research or PAR, has stubbornly persisted as a viable alternative despite being treated as marginal to standard academic methods. I want to briefly review two exemplary PAR studies, both focused on the impact of war and violence on women.

In the early 1990s, Shana Swiss, a public health physician involved in human rights work, initiated a collaborative project with a team of six Liberian community health workers and midwives to document and respond to the impact of war-time violence on women and girls. (Swiss, 1995) The project was based on the "principle that local women must identify their most pressing concerns and develop their own responses and solutions." The extent of rape and other forms of gendered violence in the long civil war in Liberia and in other war-ravaged countries like former Yugoslavia and Rwanda had only slowly come to be recognized. Each woman on the team had experienced some form of war-related violence against herself or family. The project began with their sharing their personal experiences of suffering and grief with each other.

Finding this process helpful and wanting to make it available to other women, they set out to learn more about the overall extent of violence against women and its consequences. As a first step, they talked with many women in small groups about their experiences during the war. They then designed a comprehensive survey interview on the impact of war on women and interviewed a random sample of 200 women in the country's capital city. Based on responses to the survey, they decided that midwives, as respected elders and community leaders in their villages, would be most able to help women heal from their experiences of violence.

Since many of the midwives could not read, the team developed training materials using plays, stories, and folktales and popular education approaches to help break the silence and counter the shame among women who had been raped. The stories allowed women to discuss and develop strategies for rebuilding their lives and organizing their communities to lessen violence in the future. After training, the midwives used this approach with other women in their villages. In carrying out this project the team of Liberian women learned how to use computers, design studies and analyze quantitative and qualitative data, and to turn their findings into training and educational programs. In the mid-1990s, about five years after initiation of the project, recognition of its value led to the introduction of its training materials into the Liberian Ministry

of Health's curriculum for traditional midwives and the development of a workshop for trainers of midwives in the use of these participatory methods.

The second study involved the collaboration of a community social psychologist, Brinton Lykes, with a group of twenty Mayan Ixil women in a rural village in the Guatemalan Highlands. The village was one of the many sites of mass atrocities committed during Guatemala's 36-year war that included massacres, burning villages and crops, brutal killings, and widespread disruption of families and communities. In her introduction to "Voices and Images: Mayan Ixil Women of Chajul" (ADMI, 2000), the recently published volume in Spanish and English by this collective of Mayan Ixil women, Lykes observes that it "represents the fruition of more than eight years of collaborative work using storytelling and, more recently photography." (ADMI, 2000, p. 16)

The project began with Lykes facilitating workshops with the women using popular education methods based on Paolo Freire's pedagogical approach, drawing on indigenous practices including weaving, religious ceremonies, and oral histories combined with participatory action research strategies. Few of the primarily Ixil-speaking women could speak Spanish or read or write in any language, and these approaches were ways for all to participate and communicate with each other. In the mid-1990s, Lykes showed the group photographs of Chinese rural women from a Photovoice project. (Wang, 1994, 1999) They were excited by this work and decided they wanted to use photography to develop a public record of their lives and of the impact of violence and their response to it. Through pictures and storytelling they hoped to prevent future violence, build connections with other women in Guatemala and beyond in similar circumstances, and as well gain new skills and resources for themselves and their communities to respond to the material ravages of war.

Each woman was given an automatic still camera and began taking pictures. The thematic focus of each roll was decided in workshops among all participants. Beginning with women's work, they progressively widened the range of topics to include their family lives, health and illness, traditional cultural and religious practices, the war and its effects. Analyses proceeded as they photographed with each woman selecting several photos from her roll, telling the story of each picture to a small group, and any stories she was told by the persons she photographed.

Analyses continued through successive group discussions that specified general themes and problems, pared down and clustered the photos, and elaborated interpretations through drawing, dramatization, and storytelling. Through repeated iterations of this process over a two year period, they selected the pictures that appear in the published volume - from the several thousand that had been collected - and crafted short stories for each one based on their recorded notes from all their earlier discussions and analyses. Some photos directly reflect the impact of war and violence, such as cemeteries or the exhumation of bodies, while others depict mundane activities of daily life, such as preparing a meal or selling produce in a markets. All are juxtaposed with and contextualized by stories of the pain and suffering of past violence. Together the photos, drawings, and texts document both the terrible ravages of war and the determination of the people to survive and to rebuild their lives.

In assessing the impact of the project, Lykes points to the significant difference between these photos and the process of taking them and other pictures by professional photographers or tourists - a difference that both the photographers and their subjects were well aware of. She observes that the Ixil women photographers "generated contradictions" by challenging conventional roles for women and traditional views of "who takes pictures of whom," thereby "reshaping the meanings of women's work and of photography" for themselves and their communities. (p. 20) Further, through the process of analyzing the photographs and writing the text of the published book, the core group of participating women developed computer skills, became data analysts, learned how to balance financial accounts. These new skills helped them develop other projects, write grant proposals, enter public and national arenas as advocates, and join with women in other communities in programs to improve their lives and the lives of their families. Finally, Lykes suggests that their commitment to continue with and extend their work reflects the deeper and shared understanding they arrived at through the long, intensive participatory process of their collaborative project of the "multiple causes of 'the violence' and its local effects while contributing to healing and recovery processes within the group and beyond." (p. 20)

I am sure you are aware that such complex, long-term projects do not proceed smoothly. There are many problems that go well beyond the methodological glitches of traditional studies. Lykes emphasizes the importance of being responsive to the pervasive and unavoidable ethical issues of such collaborations where entry of an outsider with previously unavailable resources into a community "represents an intervention into that community and generates consequences for the project, its participants and the community more widely" (p. 20), such as the changes noted in the roles and positions of the women. In addition, to return to the theme with which I began this review of PAR studies, "giving it away" turns out to be a highly charged process - for both giver and recipients. The question of who "owns" the study and who will control how the findings will be interpreted, assembled, disseminated and used becomes more urgent and more difficult to resolve as the project begins to achieve one of its primary aims, namely, the empowerment of those who were initially on the receiving end of the collaboration. This is a central dilemma in PAR studies - and its resolution required extensive negotiation and renegotiation in both these studies. The dilemma underlines the importance of recognizing that such work entails as fundamental a change in the role of the researcher as it does in the lives of the participants.

V: Artisans for Democracy: The Fourth World Movement

The work of the Fourth World Movement is unlike other work we're discussing today in that it is not conceived primarily as research and it has not been carried out by academic researchers. Yet, the professional research community has much to learn from the Movement's use of documentation methods and "best practices" case studies. Founded in 1958 by Fr. Joseph Wresinski, a French priest who went to the squatter settlements outside Paris to work with the poorest of the poor, the Movement has grown into an international force of 350 fulltime volunteers who serve in 22 countries around the globe. Starting from the premise that we must ask not what we have to teach to the poor but rather what we can learn from them, they work at

multiple levels, with families and communities living in extreme poverty, and with society, its members and institutions.

Work at the grassroots seeks to "break the isolation of families and communities in extreme poverty by living among them and helping them recover their basic rights and responsibilities." (Rosenfeld & Tardieu, 2000, xiii) It involves educational and cultural projects, such as Street Libraries, family preschools, and Fourth World People's Universities. It is aimed at "enabling the very poor to acquire elements of basic security such as: keeping the family together, getting and keeping decent housing, health care, and employment, and learning how to defend their rights." (xiv) Fourth World volunteers write daily reports to document their activities and learnings. These records inform a collective, reflective practice guided by questions such as: "Is this action reaching the poorest of the poor?" and "Does it heal the whole community?" (xiv)

Drawing on this extensive documentation, Jona Rosenfeld, an Israeli social work professor and longtime Movement ally, collaborated with members to describe the essential craft of the volunteers. They produced an action-oriented manual summarizing best practices -- the values, strategies, and tactics guiding volunteers' engagement with families. Rosenfeld characterizes these practices as "a myriad of unconventional ways of being, thinking, and acting, first and foremost, becoming part of the fabric of the lives of the families by sharing their daily lives and struggling alongside them for change." (xxi-xxii) Assuming that hostile, destructive, and self-defeating behavior are responses to social exclusion, Movement volunteers strive toward unconditional acceptance and are remarkably persistent in their efforts to build and maintain connections with people living in extreme poverty. Their practice teaches us the requisites for building relations of trust with "the disappeared" and the transformational possibilities of such work.

The Movement also engages in advocacy work: "documenting, understanding and making known the lives of the poorest of the poor, representing their interests at local, national and international levels; and building alliances in all spheres of society." (xiv) In contrast to the oppositional stance of my and many others' advocacy work, the movement seeks to identify institutional allies "who are vexed by persistent poverty" and who can play a role "in reversing the human-made course of mutual estrangement between excluded people and social institutions." (xxiii-xxiv) They have gained a seat at the table in European social welfare policy making circles and at the UN, where their campaign to define extreme poverty as a violation of all human rights -- civic and political as well as economic, social and cultural -- culminated in the designation of Oct. 17 as World Day to Overcome Extreme Poverty.

Jona Rosenfeld and Bruno Tardieu, the volunteer responsible for the Movement's network of allies, have compiled in their recent book, Artisans of Democracy, fascinating case studies of twelve Movement "success" stories, projects aimed at changing the practices of institutions of civil society. I only have time for a brief description of one -- an eight year campaign begun by a trio of engineers, employees of EDF, a French public utility company who were also members of the 4th World Movement network of allies, to change their company's policy of power cutting without dialogue. ("No More Power Cuts" in Artisans of Democracy)

Deeply troubled by what the very poor had to endure when their power was cut off, they began an effort which eventually became a major project of the French 4th World Movement. A key task was to convince the company that power was being cut off to people who couldn't afford to pay, not just those who refused to pay, which was the official view. Initial work focused on building support by making the Movement and its philosophy better known in their workplace. Later, by documenting the impacts of cuts on affected families and on customer relations staff actually involved with cut off families, they were able to define the problem as a shared one. Eventually, by examining all EDF studies on power cuts and customer relations, they were able to confirm that information on the poor was indeed masked by general statistics.

Their well documented, national report, *Vital Services for the Most Disadvantaged*, led to company approval of a joint exploration with disadvantaged customers to determine how to improve relations between them and the EDF. The project resulted in a reframing of the issue – today, the EDF offers services to extremely poor families that are responsive to their situations. The official goal is that none of these clients have their electricity cut off. This project has the hallmark features of 4th world advocacy work: research and documentation are key ingredients but they only become useful after the task of building alliances has been accomplished. Instead of confrontation and polarization, the search is for “reciprocal” interactions which benefit both sides; the basic assumption is that overcoming extreme poverty is in everyone's interest.

Drawing lessons from their work through analysis of documentation and reflections on practice are central activities of the Movement at this point in its history. They are interested in exchanges with the academic community that will further these efforts.

AIDS and Accusation: Pragmatic Solidarity

E: In the early 1980s, Paul Farmer, a medical anthropologist and public health physician, established a community health clinic in a small Haitian village. Soon afterwards, the first cases of AIDS appeared in the village. His book, AIDS and Accusation: Haiti and the Geography of Blame (Farmer, 1992), reports his research on the emergence, course, and distribution of AIDS in Haiti. In it, adopting a form of alliance with the community that he and his collaborators later came to call “pragmatic solidarity,” he reframes medical and popular conceptions of AIDS within the historical context of slavery and Haiti's colonial status vis-a-vis the U.S.

He proposes “an interpretive anthropology of affliction based on complementary ethnographic, epidemiological, and political-economic analyses” (p. 13) where the distinctive critical vantage points of each method are brought together to provide a fuller and more dynamic understanding of the problem. But this is more than a plea for methodological diversity, since he argues that each needs to be contextualized within historical, socio-economic frameworks of interpretation. Thus, he is equally critical of anthropologists who treat cultural differences in health and healing practices in isolation from larger political and economic forces, and misread signs of oppression and suffering as evidence for “culture” (1999, p. 7); and of quantitative health policy researchers who ignore the effects of pervasive poverty and social inequalities on the distribution and transmission of illnesses.

He applies this same critical perspective to explanatory theories about the AIDS pandemic in Haiti and the U.S., arguing that in both places blame and accusation were prominent features of social responses to it: sorcery theories at the village level in Haiti; racism among health scientists and the popular media in the U.S.; anti-colonialist theories among Haitians in response to accusations that Haiti was the site of origin of AIDS. He points to both the flaws and functions of each of these responses, e.g., of sorcery theories as an effort by people faced with severe illness to find some understanding and effective therapeutic response; of conspiracy theories as the "rhetorical defense of powerless victims"; and of the U.S. response as feeding on "xenophobia and above all racism." (1992, p. 247) Only the latter blamed the victims, and led to Haitians being classified as a high risk group by U.S. Center for Disease Control, the banning of blood donations by all Haitians, restrictions on their immigration to the U.S., and other forms of discrimination.

Farmer's study was instrumental in turning the U.S. accusatory model of explanation on its head, leading to the reversal of U.S. discriminatory policies: rather than Haitians being the source of the AIDS virus, current understanding of its epidemiology indicates that it came to Haiti and other Caribbean countries from the United States "perhaps especially through tourism." (1992, p. 260) This is an instance of an effective critique of the "official story" through the deconstruction of racial myths and stereotypes. Further, the Haiti/AIDS project initiated a series of studies of the impacts on health of social and economic inequality by a team of researchers in the Partners in Health institute founded by Farmer and his collaborator Jim Yong Kim. The detailed comparative case studies reported in their recent book, Dying for Growth: Global Inequality and the Health of the Poor (Kim et al, 2000) lead them to conclude that: differentials in rates of infectious diseases are biological expressions of social inequalities. (Farmer, 1999)

The work by Farmer and his colleagues is a powerful example of both the theoretical understanding and practical benefits that may be gained by the fusion of advocacy with partnership. As public health physicians in a relationship of "pragmatic solidarity" with the poor - a position that Farmer notes draws its inspiration from Liberation Theology - they both speak *for* their patients from a critical historical and political perspective and provide health services that reflect communities' own definitions of their needs. The dilemma posed by their work to which I want to call attention has to do with the critical stance vis-a-vis people's own views and explanations of their experiences - that is expressed in Farmer's analysis of Haitian sorcery and conspiracy theories - which contrasts with the pervasive view among qualitative researchers, for whom taking the perspective of our respondents is the fundamental touchstone of our work.

We place a premium on listening to and getting our respondents' "voices" heard, of using their understandings of their experiences as the basis for our theories, of "member checks" of our interpretations as tests of their validity. Although the ethnographic component of Farmer's study relies on his observations on the ground and in the clinic, and he presents Haitians' stories about the appearance and impact of AIDS and their explanations, he treats their accounts from a critical vantage point rather than as the "truth" to which he must align his own interpretation. Thus, he frames his analysis of their "sorcery" and "conspiracy" theories, within a historical and political context just as he does the theories of public health experts in the U.S. and other countries.

Another recent example of the contextualization and critical re-interpretation of respondents' own understandings of their circumstances is Pierre Bourdieu's report of his large-scale study of poverty in France, based on qualitative interviews. (The Weight of the World: Social Suffering in Contemporary Society. Bourdieu, et al 1999/1993) The book is a radical critique of what Bourdieu refers to as the "abandonment by the state" of poor people by the French government's neoliberal economic policies, and it caused a political furor in France. Within this radical political perspective and in a work of committed advocacy, Bourdieu nonetheless argues that his respondents' views do not provide an adequate basis for theoretical explanation or practical action. Asserting that his respondents rely on the "tacit presuppositions of common sense" and do not "possess a science of what they are and what they do" (p. 620), he advances the claim that it is the sociologist's task to develop such a science by acting as a "midwife" who challenges common sense views and brings to consciousness the "real bases of the discontent and dissatisfaction" which people experience at a deep level but are unaware of and therefore express in inappropriate forms.

This dilemma, between taking our respondents' understandings at face value as representing the "true" explanation of their situations vs. a critical analysis that locates their views within a social, historical context, requires more discussion than it has received among those of us doing solidarity work. We are wary, for many good reasons, of further delegitimizing their ways of seeing and understanding their experiences and their social worlds. Nonetheless, our disciplinary training provides theoretical and methodological tools, and the skeptical orientation of the research enterprise, to critically analyze and unpack the assumptions underlying social discourses and the culturally-grounded categories and theories that we live by. Does this critical stance have a place in the research we do as solidarity work, or is it simply a sign of our traditional academic arrogance? Is it possible to be simultaneously a critic and an ally? Are there ways to make our critiques useful to those with whom we ally ourselves? What are the risks involved and how might we deal with them? These are not questions I would presume to settle, but I hope they will be part of our discussion.

Conclusions

E: Our primary intent in this paper has been to encourage you to become academic allies, to join forces with activists in the struggle for social justice. By reviewing a variety of approaches to solidarity work, we hoped to motivate you to look for opportunities in your institutions and communities that would best fit both your academic interests and skills, and your political perspectives. We also highlighted recurrent dilemmas in such work to alert you to the complexities of the dual role of an activist-researcher.

In closing, I want to return to the identity Vicky assigned me early on as primarily a researcher - a characterization I did not contest. What that has meant for me is that I have learned to live with contradictions: as an academic scholar, engaging in a critique of the current state of theory and research in psychology and the social sciences, while at the same time, as an

activist researcher, making claims for the adequacy of studies that may advance our political objectives. I continue to pursue my specific theoretical and research interests in studies that are not directly linked to my collaborative work with activist groups. This is a different path than that taken by others - including Vicky - for whom the research they do as activists has moved to the center of their academic work. They have integrated the two roles, which for me remain in dialectic tension.

These are but two of the many alternative modes of doing solidarity work, each of which strikes a different balance between our activist and academic identities. And for many, perhaps all of us, this balance shifts over time in response to changing circumstances. Since we want, and need, more and more of you to find a way into solidarity work, I hope you will not worry yourself into inaction because of the risks, difficulties, uncertainties, and dilemmas that are involved. Based on my own experience, I can assure you that these problems recede when they are placed within the broader context of the work you do with others in the important task of making a more just and humane world.

V: We are entering a political era when our faith in the efficacy of activist research may be more sorely tried than ever before. For me, as I am sure is true for many of you, the struggle to believe that what I am doing will make a difference has been a long one. But in recent years, I have become clearer about what I can contribute as an academic ally and researcher working in solidarity with those who are being treated unjustly, even as I remain deeply worried about whether those of us who are committed to achieving a more just society are going to succeed.

While part of our purpose today has been analytic, to examine the complexities and dilemmas of doing solidarity research, I have to admit that I came in good measure to proselytize, to move you to action. I want to close by emphasizing the critical importance of challenging the dominant definitions of what the problem is. The myths that have been perpetuated about for instance the success of welfare reform, as measured by declining numbers on the rolls, and the failure of public education, as defined by arbitrary high stakes test scores, to mention the two I know best, must be contested in both professional and political contexts.

Too many academic researchers have bought into the official measures. Virtually all the articles in the latest *Journal of Social Issues* (Zuckerman & Kalil, 2000) on "The Impact of Welfare Reform" conclude that results to date are mixed. They note that while the numbers employed have risen, these women have not moved out of poverty and some indeed are suffering. The neutral tone of these reports may seem like professional objectivity. To me, it reflects a loss of a moral compass - how many Human Rights Violations do we need before we conclude, not that more research is needed, but that something is seriously wrong.

In the political arena, we must be vigilant and outspoken critics of the official stories, of the clever disinformation campaigns used to justify regressive social policies.

Elliot and I wish to thank you for your attention and invite you to join the dialogue.

References

- ADMI (Asociacion de la Mujer Maya Ixil). (2000). Voices and Images: Mayan Ixil Women of Chajul. Chajul, El Quiche, Guatemala: ADMI/Asociacion de la Mujer Maya Ixil (U.S. distributor: EPICA -epicabooks@igc.org). In Spanish and English. Introduction by M. Brinton Lykes.
- Bourdieu, P. et al. (1999/1993). The weight of the world: Social suffering in contemporary society. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. (Translated by P. P. Ferguson, S. Emanuel, J. Johnson, S.T. Waryn).
- Edin, K. & Lein, L. (1997) Making ends meet: How single mothers survive welfare and low-wage work. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Farmer, P. (1992) AIDS and accusation: Haiti and the geography of blame. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Farmer, P. (1999) Infections and inequalities: The modern plagues. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Kim, J.Y., Millen, J.V., Irwin, A., & Gershman, J. (Eds.). (2000). Dying for growth: Global inequality and the health of the poor. Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press.
- Martin-Baro, I. (1994). Writings for a liberation psychology. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Foreword by Elliot G. Mishler. (Translated by Adrienne Aron and Shawn Corne).
- Rosenfeld, J. M. & Tardieu, B. (2000). Artisans of Democracy: How ordinary people, families in extreme poverty, and social institutions become allies to overcome social exclusion. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.
- Steinitz, V. (September 1996). Interim Report: Welfare and Human Rights Monitoring Project. Cambridge, MA: Unitarian Universalist Service Committee.
- Swiss, S. (1995). Violence against women in war. Women's Rights International. (Flyer for lecture at Boston University School of Medicine, November 27, 1995).
- Unitarian Universalist Service Committee. (September 2000). Report on 1998-1999 Data: Welfare and Human Rights Monitoring Project. Cambridge, MA: Unitarian Universalist Service Committee.
- Wang, C. & Burris, M.A. (1994) Empowerment through Photo Novella: Portraits of participants. Health Education Quarterly, 21(2), 171-186.
- Wang, C. (1999). Photovoice: A participatory action research strategy applied to women's health. Journal of Women's Health, 8(2), 185-192.
- Yates, P. & Kinoy, P. (1998). Outriders. (Video documentary on the Kensington Welfare Rights Union). New York: Skylight Pictures.
- Zuckerman, D. & Kalil, A. (Eds.) (2000) "The Impact of Welfare Reform." Journal of Social Issues, 56, 4, 579-820.